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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Associated Country Women of the World, Institute of Cultural Affairs International, Solar Cookers International, Soroptimist International, Women's Union of Russia, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, and World Association of Industrial and Technological Research Organizations, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Statement for Commission on the Status of Women 63 March 2019, from the Associated Country Women of the World and Soroptomist International

Priority Theme:

Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;

The Sustainable Development Goals stand as waypoints along the road to accomplishing the 2030 Agenda, and first among them is 'No Poverty'. Member States, Civil Society and individuals have collectively agreed that these Goals must be achieved, but we must also recognise that these Goals are a starting point for genuine social change. Poverty is not a binary issue. Those currently in poverty may escape, may fall back, may barely survive on the edge. Others may prosper, only to suffer from economic, natural or health disaster. Social Protection Systems must be implemented, and Member States commit to ensuring their availability across the whole life course — targeting not just poverty — but addressing the risk of poverty and broader causes and impacts on women in every nation.

Whilst we have seen positive impacts made in the provision of pensions for those in older age groups, there remains a lot to be done in terms of access to social protections globally. Those in indigenous communities, ethnic minorities, migrants, those with disabilities, widows and young people are all less likely to secure decent, paid work and stability. These challenges are compounded if you are a woman, and more so when you live in a rural community.

Social protection systems must include an informed, gender-sensitive approach in their construction. Without this, the specific obstacles to women's involvement will always remain, and the system will fail to consider their needs and priorities. Women must be included in the decision-making processes that determine criteria for eligibility, or programmes will fall foul of inequality in household or family dynamics. Programmes must target individuals — and women in particular — rather than households if they are to overcome issues surrounding women's access to, and control of, resources.

The likelihood of women's access is further reduced when we take into account traditional assumptions about the role and responsibilities of women, particularly around childcare and mobility outside the home. Women with less education will be less connected to opportunities for social protections, and in particular those with complicated procedures for enrolling. Formal processes, such as birth registration, will support access to social protection programmes, but Member States must also address the complications of legal identification when considering migrants, refugees, stateless, homeless persons, those in rural communities who have fallen outside of formal registrations, and those without the education or literacy skills necessary to apply for support.

Social sensibility is important and must be combined with educational campaigns to remove the stigma surrounding the need for reliance on social protection programmes, as well as a wider approach to social change so that this reliance is genuinely transitory, and beneficiaries are able to progress to more stable, comfortable, and sustainable lives.

In rural communities' women are at the forefront of the labour market, where income and job insecurity are greater, work often revolves around seasonal terms, and climate change is having the greatest impact. They are over-represented in informal,

non-standard or temporary work, and continue to be the main providers of care work. This leaves reduced time for formal education, employment, and political activity. Even in countries with developed social protection programmes, the overall impact is a gender gap in contributory social protection coverage, including old-age pensions.

Whilst it is understood that reaching rural communities is more expensive, it must be remembered that accessing services becomes harder and more expensive for people in these areas, thus aggravating an already challenging situation. Funds must therefore be prioritised, and locally appropriate methods implemented. Some countries have made specific efforts to reach their citizens in rural communities, but much more must be done to support those most distanced from the reality of existing social protection programmes and ensure that they are consulted regarding the creation of new ones.

We welcome the commitment Member States have made to the Sustainable Development Goals, and that all participants in the Sixty-Third Session of the Commission on the Status of Women are committed to ensuring progress and agreed conclusions on social protections for women globally. We call on all those at the negotiating table to further ensure that women in rural communities are not forgotten, and that those voices hardest to hear resonate with us all in these two weeks.